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# ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty

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## **ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty**

Signed on May 26, 1972 by Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev and ratified 88-2 by the U.S. Senate on August 2, 1972, this agreement ostensibly limited the U.S. and Soviet Union to deploying two anti-ballistic missile sites within their national territories. One U.S. site housed at Grand Forks, North Dakota, housed Safeguard ABMs and another site, which was never built, was intended to defend the Washington, DC area. Moscow was the primary Soviet site. Treaty provisions also limited each site to 100 missiles and launchers, 15 additional launchers at test sites, regulated the types of radars at each site, and implicitly recognized the value of space-based reconnaissance to ensure compliance with arms control agreements. A 1974 protocol reduced the number of ABM sites each country could deploy to one. This agreement represented the apex of the nuclear doctrine of mutual assured destruction and had many defenders in international foreign policy and security communities who believed it would regulate proliferation of nuclear missiles.

It was repeatedly violated by the Soviets, however, as evidenced by ABM facilities at Krasnoyarsk and Plesetsk. The treaty also encountered increasing criticism from Republican presidential administrations and congressional critics who believed it limited the United States' ability to defend itself from emerging

ballistic missile threats. Its value deteriorated drastically after the Cold War, as ballistic missile technology proliferated to countries such as Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Pakistan. China never adhered to the treaty. Increasing U.S. concerns that proliferation of this technology would also reach transnational terrorists, as well as rogue regimes, and inhibit United States and other countries' efforts to develop ballistic missile defense systems lead the United States to withdraw from the ABM Treaty in 2001.

This withdrawal met a muted reaction from Russia and the ABM Treaty's legacy must be seen as an example of an arms control agreement failing to keep up with proliferating and advancing weapons technologies, and the desire of countries such as the United States and its allies to defend themselves against the increasing threat posed by conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction delivered by ballistic missiles.

*Bert Chapman*

**See also:** Brezhnev, Leonid Ilyich (1906-1982)

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